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“HOW MANY POINTS IS THIS WORTH?”: EXPLORING GRADING CONTRACTS
IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the shortcomings of the traditional grading system in high school classes and explores alternative approaches to grading in the English classroom. Classroom research explores contract grading as an effective option among high-achieving students to create a safe environment for deep learning and creative risk-taking.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: A Worrier

“I find that kids are only worried about doing well with their grades as opposed to being interested in what they are learning.” (Andrew, Survey, 2/27/14)

After reading *The Scarlet Letter* in my junior year of high school, we were assigned to create a letter – a badge of shame – to wear for the day. What was our flaw? What marked us? After careful deliberation, I settled on a *W*. I was a Worrier.

Throughout my own education, I felt the pressure of grades. I enjoyed learning for the sake of learning, but a nagging fear of failure kept me from ever fully relaxing. I could not enjoy the act of learning; whether I liked it or not, I learned in pursuit of an A, not an education.

When I began my teacher education, I knew I didn’t want to impart that same stress on my students. I wrote in my journal, “It’s my belief that we cannot grow without making mistakes, and I want my classroom to be a safe haven where mistakes do not debilitate us but propel us forward.” I realize now that I did not want my students so focused on potential mistakes that they wouldn’t take a risk. With a grade hanging in the balance, would they feel comfortable enough to enjoy the act of learning?

This year, as a beginning teacher with my own eleventh graders in the desks in front of me, I sensed the stress. I could almost feel its repellent magnetism. My students had a chemistry test next period, two chapters to read for social studies, a soccer game that would last until 10:00 at night, and my English class was just another stressor to add to their docket. Like Hester Prynne’s A, they worried more about the label of grades than their actual learning. But did it have to be this way? Did students need the external motivation of a grade to put forth effort in class?

Was earning an A just for the sake of a high grade a trait to be encouraged? I wasn't sure, but I wondered what would happen if I changed the standard grading policy in my classroom.

My Beliefs

As I began to question the role of grades in education, I found myself questioning my beliefs about the purpose of education. According to Alfie Kohn, a teacher can explore his approach to grades on three levels of increasing depth:

Level 1: Here, teachers concern themselves primarily with the practice of grading. They attempt to make grading as equitable as possible. However, teachers take for granted that students receive grades, and "by extension," Kohn writes, "that students ought to be avidly concerned about the ones they will get" ("Grading: The Issue..." 1).

Level 2: On this level, educators might challenge the use of traditional grading and seek more "authentic" alternative assessments for their classrooms. Kohn notes, "The idea here is to provide a richer, deeper description of students' achievement" ("Grading: The Issue..." 1).

Level 3: According to Kohn, "Rather than challenging grades alone, discussions at this level challenge the whole enterprise of assessment -- and specifically why we are evaluating students as opposed to how we are doing so" ("Grading: The Issue..." 1). Until one has uncovered her beliefs about the purpose of evaluation and education in general, she cannot fully question her implementation of any evaluative model. At Level 3, these questions of purpose come into play.

As I continued my research and thinking about grades, I moved slowly from Level 1 (Why am I taking points off for the incorrect font?) to Level 2 (Do students look at my comments, or do they fixate on the grade at the top of the page?) to Level 3 (Are grades healthy for students? Are they important? Why do we give them? What would happen if I didn't?).

I found that it was important to understand my beliefs about education in general before I could truly identify and justify my beliefs about grades:

1. I believe that students and their teacher construct the meaning of a text together; no one individual has the answer key. In fact, I believe there is no answer key. (If there is no answer key, on what am I grading my learners?)
2. I believe that risk-taking is necessary for learning. (Will students take a risk if they're graded on the outcome?)
3. I believe that a welcoming, safe, and respectful classroom best encourages those risks. (Do students feel safe when they're graded? Do they feel respected?)

With these beliefs roughly defined, I uncovered more questions and no answers. Grades, traditionally A-F or percentages defined and determined by the teacher, are an institutional practice. They're ubiquitous. Until this year, I never thought to question them. I read what Kohn might call a Level 1 opinion from Marge Scherer, "There is no doubt that our society believes in grades. We look for four-star movies, five-star restaurants, top-10 colleges, and even Grade A eggs" (1). I stopped short. I realized my discomfort with grades: our culture is so bound to ratings that we place children on the same scales as movies, restaurants, even eggs. Should we use these instances as a case to keep grades, or should we search for a different option? I sought out more research to inform my instinctive reaction to grades. If I wanted to enter the conversation, I needed to define it first.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

“I think there needs to be some system to measure work and effort but I believe that the grading system is screwed and outdated.” (Rachel, Survey, 2/27/14)

According to Thomas Guskey’s “Making the Grade: What Benefits Students?” grading emerged in the late nineteenth century at the same time as compulsory attendance laws. Prior, few students continued their education beyond the one-room, one-teacher schoolhouse. As more students enrolled in school, they were grouped by grade level. Teachers did not yet grant letter grades; they would simply record the skills that the student had mastered.

In the early 1900s, high school teachers shifted from listed skills to grades based on percentages as a way to certify mastery and save time. Critics questioned the new percentage system almost immediately. Researchers Starch and Elliot found considerable variation in how different teachers graded the same English essay or geometry paper. Some teachers considered neatness, spelling, and punctuation, whereas others simply looked at the content of the paper. With varying markers of success, grades were not a consistent, reliable system for measuring students’ successes. However, grades persisted, and soon larger categories – Excellent, Good, Average, Poor, and Failing (corresponding to letters A, B, C, D, and F) – became the norm. While some schools reverted to verbal descriptions, pass/fail systems, or mastery models of education over the following years, most schools continue to rate students based on a percentage and a corresponding letter, A through F. Now, with the ease of online gradebooks, most

assignments are worth a certain number of points, and every assignment earns a percentage. At the end of a term, percentages are aggregated to rank student performance in every class. Percentages have become a daily focus of school.

So why do we use grades? Grades are built on over a century of tradition, and “although these traditions stem largely from misunderstandings about the goals of education and the purposes of grading, they remain ingrained in the social fabric of our society” (“Five Obstacles...” 17).

Recent research calls into question the use of traditional grading practices. Articles range from Kohn’s Level 1 (supporting new, more specific rubrics) to Level 3 (proposing alternative theories to the traditional approach). However, few articles defend traditional grading. In “It’s Broken – Fix It!” O’Hagan offers six major criticisms of grades. I will use her framework as the outline of my own survey of the literature and my own experiences related to grades in the high school English classroom. I will use pseudonyms throughout to refer to my students’ work and feedback.

Scientific Inconsistency

Percentage grades are meant to add precision to grading, implying that there is one measurable scale on which all writing is graded. Therefore, “...all papers in any classroom that receive a particular grade are of equal quality” (O’Hagan 6). However, according to Guskey, the study by Starch and Elliott published in 1912 found that while some teachers would give a paper a failing score, others would assign the same paper a score of 90 or more (“Making the Grade...” 18). Personal preference or environment can influence grades. Often, biases related to behavior

and even handwriting affect scores students receive (“Making the grade” 16). Recently, rubrics have become more detailed in an effort to delete bias from the grading process, but the scientific inconsistency still remains.

I surveyed my AP English 11 students – 61 in total – in an attempt to understand their attitudes towards grades. Kelly wrote about the subjective nature of work in the English classroom: “In these situations, i [sic] do not think the grader can accurately put a specific numeral value on someone’s work without there being human error/bias.” She asserts that the study of English extends beyond objective grading and agrees that the teacher’s bias can affect grades in the classroom. Another student, John wrote, “...Grades are often artificially high, or low, depending on the teacher and difficulty of the class.” John identifies the inconsistency of grades across classrooms; even within one high school, grades can vary immensely based on the teacher. It becomes clear after reading these surveys that my own students have noticed the invalidity of grades both across classrooms and within one classroom.

According to experts and my students, grades do not seem to accurately measure a student’s work no matter how much we refine our rubrics, so why do we continue to grade subjective qualities with an objective measurement?

False Motivation

My own students, when asked about the value of grades, seemed to agree that grades are necessary to keep students motivated and trying. They generally held the idea expressed by one student that “If I didn’t have grades it would be a lot harder for me to be motivated.” Another student, Elliott, wrote, “Without them I would try so much less.”

O'Hagan too identifies this commonly held belief: students wouldn't be motivated without grades (5). However, the problem exemplifies a false motivation that focuses more on the grade than the act of learning. Jake wrote in his survey, "I think grades add a false sentiment behind learning as something that you HAVE to do, rather than something that you WANT to do." Jake writes that the current grading system pulls focus away from learning as a natural and inherently exciting act and places unnecessary external motivators in place to tell students that they must learn. He understands O'Hagan's idea of false motivation: that grades do not incite students to learn, simply to work towards a certain grade.

Research shows that grades tend to create a preference for the easiest possible task, according to Kohn ("The Case Against..." 9). Students will avoid unnecessary intellectual risks in an effort to ensure the best grade. For example, when students know that their grade depends on the teacher, they might mirror their teacher's thinking rather than reason through a problem in their own way; they choose the safe bet rather than the intellectual risk. For example, when Marla received a graded quiz on *The Great Gatsby* at the beginning of the school year, her first reaction was to comment on her grade – 8.5 out of 10 – and remark that she did not know how to earn full credit on the assignment. I worried that rather than thinking deeply about the themes in the novel, Marla was simply trying to guess at what her teacher wanted to read. She was motivated, it seems, to earn a particular grade, not to learn. Kohn says, "Extrinsic motivation, which includes a desire to get better grades, often undermines intrinsic motivation, a desire to learn for its own sake" ("The Case Against..." 10). In fact, if students have one eye constantly trained on their graded performance, they can never fully dive into the experience of learning for fear of failure. They lose that ability to take risks that I identify as one of my core beliefs because

they do not want their grades to reflect an unsuccessful risk or a risk their teacher did not agree with.

False Indicators of Worth

Inherent in the traditional grading model is the idea of teacher as judge. Work is submitted by the student and then evaluated by the teacher. However, grades often become tied to students' perceptions of their self-worth. In response to the survey, my student Ariana wrote, "I feel that you are kind of defined by your grade, that you are just a letter, when you should be defined by your abilities and character." Patty said, "I feel that right now we are at a point where almost all of our worth as a student is dependent on the grades and GPA we receive." So much of a student's identity is bound in her grades, especially in junior year, when her GPA could mean the difference between an acceptance and rejection from their preferred school. When teachers grade on a number or letter scale, they run the risk of impacting a student's overall self-worth – a daunting idea. Further, with the aforementioned scientific inconsistency of grading scales, these markers of self-worth have little standard between one teacher and the next, even one student and the next. These emotions, again, are likely to get in the way of what Kohn calls "intellectual risks" ("The Case Against..." 9). So grades, it seems, can hurt students' self-worth while limiting the depth of their learning and their willingness to take risks in the classroom.

Student/Teacher Barriers

When a teacher takes on the role of judge, it creates an unnecessary barrier between the student and teacher. “There must be a feeling of mutual trust and respect” in the classroom, O’Hagan writes, “A student must not feel threatened by or unsure of a teacher... Grades perpetuate the myth that the teacher has all the answers, and it is the students’ job to pick the right ones” (11). This myth diverges from my core beliefs of education, as I believe that no person in the classroom has all the answers. Rather, upon reading a text, the students and teacher work together to create meaning and a mutual understanding of the text.

However, I see O’Hagan’s belief at work in my own classroom. After seeing an essay grade online, Carly approached me and asked what she did wrong. I appreciated that she wanted to improve, but the word “wrong” bothered me. To me, in any form of writing, there isn’t a “wrong” answer; there are areas for improvement. However, grades do support the idea that there is one right answer, the teacher has it, and it will earn you an A. O’Hagan says, “Even a passing score that is less than an A implies a degree of failure,” and I saw that at work with this particular student, who assumed her B paper was fraught with errors (5). Carly did not see me as a partner who could help improve her writing; she saw me as an authority who possessed the correct answers at which she was guessing.

Superficial Learning

Although in the prior example Carly did want to learn and improve, the literature suggests that when students focus on a grade and not the task at hand, their learning becomes superficial. I saw this in my own learning; in college, I would cram for a test, celebrate my A,

and find that I had forgotten the material within a week. I see the same in my students. After handing back a graded essay to the class, full of my own edits and comments, I noticed that students turned immediately to look for the grade, ignoring the comments that might help them understand it. Tiffany agreed in her survey: “Most students don’t really look over thoroughly their past tests to see what they got wrong then try to figure out the right answer. We just look at our grade and never look at it again.” When students are focused on a grade, they become less focused on the learning process itself. They celebrate an A and assume they are masters, or they throw a C- in the trash and assume they will never improve.

Kohn says, “Grades tend to reduce the quality of students’ thinking. They may skim books for what they’ll ‘need to know’” (“The Case Against...” 9). In a recent unit, my students journaled their thoughts and reflections about *The Things They Carried*. I did not grade these journals in an effort to focus on their ideas, not grades. However, when asked to reflect on the process, Jeremy wrote, “I just felt like I was just looking through the book for the info that would get me a good grade... I wasn’t reading to enjoy the story.” This response surprised me, partly because I was not grading the journals that he referred to, but I understand the sentiment behind his comment. Grades have become so ingrained in the process of learning that this particular student had trouble relaxing and taking risks even when he was explicitly not graded.

When grades are the focus, the most important thing is memorization of the right facts – not enjoyment or creative thinking. If a teacher tests the students on characters’ names, it becomes of great importance that students memorize the characters’ names, but they might not delve into the personal struggles of the characters. If a teacher decides that vocabulary will appear on the test, the students will look up vocabulary words, but perhaps miss the theme of the story as it relates to them. Creating one’s own meaning of a text becomes secondary to

understanding the teacher's meaning of the text, a concept opposed to my core beliefs about education.

In response to my survey, Allie stated, "When people are already stressed and stretched to the limit balancing their grades and lives, few have the excess inspiration or motivation for learning beyond what they are required to learn." I ask, then, if grades did not exist, would students be more inspired to learn beyond the minimum requirements?

Limits on Teaching and Teachers

While Kohn states that grades diminish the creative potential of students, my research also asserts that the creativity of teachers also declines. In an effort to increase the ease and consistency of grading, teachers sometimes "reduce assignments to what is measurable" (O'Hagan 11). They may give a multiple choice test over an essay exam or rate writing based on grammar and mechanics instead of content. Jongsma writes:

While it may be easy to evaluate spelling and punctuation, these skills pale into insignificance beside the ability to create, to imagine, to relate one thought to another, to organize, to reason, or to catch the nuances of English prose.

Inventing, reasoning, responding, and reflecting, do not readily lend themselves to the testing or grading usually required by school districts and reported on most report cards. (318)

When teachers do not emphasize these important skills, students are less likely to develop them or, sadly, find worth in them. Higher level skills that are harder to grade numerically are marginalized in favor of that which is measurable. I maintain that, often, the most easily

measurable skills are not the most important. In my own experience, I found that MLA headings and mechanics were highly weighted skills on essays. While I do acknowledge a certain value in proper mechanics, the emphasis placed on them seemed to overshadow the worth of the ideas set forth in the essay. I suspect that because MLA headings and mechanics are easier to grade objectively, they took precedence over the less quantifiable aspects of the paper, which are often, in my opinion, the more important qualities. Thus, my student Nate, who thought deeply about topics but wrote with an incorrect heading and improperly sized margins most of the time, saw his grade reduced for rather insignificant issues.

Ultimately, research shows that the traditional approach to grades fails both the students and the teacher. However, grades are upheld by long-standing myths that oppose the ideas presented here: that learning should be measurable and situated nicely on a bell curve and that a priority in education must be to sort the unskilled from the talented. This is a value held by my students, too, as many referenced ranking and comparison in their survey responses. Students wrote, "...Seeing where you are in relationship to the rest of your class is important," "[Grades] help... separate classes into different groups- [advanced] and basic," and "It gives you a look at how you have done in comparison to others." Students seem to hold value in ranking their grades against others, perhaps because traditional grades are so ingrained in our country's school system.

However, Guskey asks, "Is my purpose to *select* talent or *develop* it?" If a teacher's purpose is to select talent, then, yes, their students' scores might fall on that bell curve. However, if a teacher aims to develop talent, "you clarify what you want students to learn and be able to do. Then you do everything possible to ensure that all students learn those things well. If you succeed, there should be little or no variation in measures of student learning" ("Five Obstacles..." 17). If all students master the same skills, it seems there is no longer a need to

measure those skills numerically or alphabetically, and, in fact, measuring in that way prevents truly deep learning from taking place.

Chapter 3

Moving Away From Grades

“[If] there were another method of receiving feedback without worrying about a letter defining your academic ability, I would be all for it.” (Carrie, Survey, 2/27/14)

With a new understanding of the conversation surrounding traditional grading, I felt ready to explore my next big question: How do I move away from grades? I suspected that a sudden dive into the deep end would result in anarchy. After all, my students told me in their survey responses that they needed grades for motivation:

If students [who are] used to the [traditional] grading method, which tends to foster sneakiness, competition and stress, are introduced to these new methods, they may be suspicious, lazy, or not take assignments seriously in this capacity. When you have one assignment to do that will be graded with an iron fist, and another that you will self-grade, which one will you put more time and effort into? (Allie, Survey, 2/27/14)

Allie was right that students so ingrained in traditional grading might not be able to jump into an alternative grading system (like self-grading) right away. How, then, could I gradually turn the focus from grades to learning? I looked to Alfie Kohn for advice.

First, he says, prescriptive comments (“exceeds expectations,” “meets expectations,” etc.) are no more effective than letter grades. “If you’re sorting students into... piles, you’re still

grading them” (“The Case Against...” 12). Further, Kohn cautions against telling students in advance what’s expected of them. Rather, he argues that school should be an “adventure of ideas” in which learning is less like a test and more like an exploration (“The Case Against...” 12). Finally, narrative comments and grades cannot authentically coexist. When they are used together, “the comments are written to justify the grade” (“The Case Against...” 12). Kohn goes on to support my suspicion that students ignore the comments in favor of the grade, but “when there’s only a comment, they read it” (“The Case Against...” 12).

From these “don’ts,” I started to compile a list of my own “dos.” Effective feedback should:

- *Involve students in the process.* Kohn writes that under the traditional grading model “schooling is unfair in the wider sense that it prepares students to pass other people’s tests without strengthening their capacity to set their own assignment in collaboration with their fellows” (“The Case Against...” 12). Allowing students in on the decisions not only ensures that they are learning effectively, it also prepares them to learn in the “real world.” Thus, involving students in the process means that the class creates the context in which we learn together. Furthermore, when students are allowed to work together to make decisions, it creates new learning opportunities that require students to think deeply about ideas that will impact their own learning.
- *Include narrative assessments or conferencing.* While the literature advises against grades, it does not advocate a shift from all feedback. These narrative assessments, as Kohn says, are more useful to learners than comments combined with grades because students tend to spend more time looking at the comments when there is no grade attached. Thus, students spend more time focused on learning how to improve and less time searching for their grade.

- *Wait until the end of the learning process to measure progress.* Kohn insists that if teachers are compelled to give grades (which most teachers are), they should wait until the student is ready to demonstrate his skill. “Studies suggest that rewards are most destructive when given for skills still being honed” (“Grading: The Issue...” 6). Students are also more likely to develop a skill when they have enough time to work through it. If a teacher measures progress before a student is ready, his learning will end prematurely and he might not develop the skill.

Finally, Kohn advises, “If there is a movement away from grades, teachers should explain the rationale and solicit suggestions from students. That transition may be bumpy and slow, but the chance to engage in personal and collective reflection about these issues will be important in its own right” (“Grading: The Issue...” 6). This passage both prompted my survey and expanded one core belief: not only do we create meaning of a text together, we can also create the context in which we learn together. This context, to me, includes the freedom to take intellectual risks and an emphasis on deep learning, not a grade. I hoped that my students and I could work together to create a classroom in which we felt comfortable taking risks and learning.

From both the literature and my students’ surveys, I identified some alternative grading models that I wanted to explore more closely: student-created rubrics, student-determined grades, and contract grades.

Chapter 4

A Look at a Contract Unit

“Students should be doing their best to learn not to get ahead of someone else or to reach a certain percentage... in a subject, but learning because they are passionate about it and genuinely enjoy what they are doing.” (Riley, Survey, 2/27/14)

The Students

In my year of student teaching, I had the unique opportunity to work with two different sets of students. In the fall, I worked with two sections of Advanced English 11 students, one comprised of 23 students and the other 14 students. These students were 16 or 17 years old and were capable readers and writers. Toward the beginning of the year, in a survey distributed to both sections of the class, many Advanced 11 students expressed to me that they felt stressed when it came to receiving grades. In fact, several students listed “getting a good grade” as what motivated them to do well in school.

In the spring, I began teaching three sections of Advanced Placement Language and Composition to gain new experience with new students. These sections held 26, 23, and 22 students. Also 16 and 17 years old, these 71 students were considered the strongest in their class when it came to English Language Arts. They were avid readers and comfortable with rhetorical writing. When I joined the class in the middle of the year, I was informed that the students cared very much about their grades. In fact, when I surveyed these AP students, 51 said they felt pressured, 36 said fearful, and 18 used the word defeated to describe their attitudes toward grades.

Again, these students listed getting a good grade as a primary motivator in school. Furthermore, these students were enrolled in several Advanced Placement classes, adding even more stress to their schedules.

The Unit

Because of my unique year-long placement, I had the opportunity to teach *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien to both my Advanced and AP students. In my first unit with Advanced students, I tried a method called contract grading in an attempt to move the focus away from grades, as my research had encouraged. After my first experience, I used survey responses from both my Advanced and AP students to alter the contract and better represent the opinions of my students. In this section I will discuss the first unit's structure and some outcomes.

The Grading Contract

In the grading contract structure, students are given a list of tasks to accomplish. They receive a C if they complete a minimum number of tasks, a B if they complete tasks beyond the minimum, and an A if they complete all the tasks. Because individual assignments are not graded, the contract attempts to minimize emphasis on grades. Thus, I decided to try a grading contract for our unit on *The Things They Carried* (See Appendix A).

As I spoke with other teachers who utilize contract grading, I learned that the contract can ensure students are completing the task at a high quality despite the fact that they are not graded. I included several different requirements to the contract. A performance requirement (students

will share their stories aloud in class) ensured quality because it meant that students would have an audience for their work. Inherent in this assignment was an acknowledgment that others would hear their final product, which I hoped would inspire the students to create stories they were proud to share without fear of a grade. Furthermore, an editing requirement (students will have a peer/parent/etc. edit their stories before the deadline) meant that student had to have a second set of eyes look over their stories before the final product was due. I hoped that these edits would give my students an opportunity to work out kinks in their stories without fear of being graded by their editor. In addition, the class spent a period peer editing each other's essays to ensure a higher quality product. My students were accustomed to peer editing in the classroom, and they were able to check for grammar, organization, and clear introductions and conclusions in their peers' writing. Not only did this provide my students with comments prior to turning in the final product, it also gave my students a chance to view their peers' work and learn more about *The Things They Carried* from other perspectives. In this way, the learning did not finish with the final discussion; students shared their ideas until the final day of the unit.

Ultimately, I chose to break down the final assignment in a way that satisfies Bloom's Taxonomy, which "identifies a hierarchy of cognitive skills that can be developed through the process of learning" (Heery). Bloom's Taxonomy's most basic level of learning is Knowledge, or simply memorizing facts. Next, Comprehension requires that students understand what they are learning. At the next level, Application, students apply their knowledge to new situations. The highest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy include: Analysis, or breaking material down into its constituent parts and identifying connections; Synthesis, or reassembling those parts to create something new; and Evaluation, or judging the value of the material (Heery.)

If students decided to only write the essay, they had engaged in an analysis of the novel. If students decided to then write a story from the style element analyzed in their essay, they created a new product, falling under Bloom's category Synthesis. If, then, the students justified their stories by highlighting and writing in the margins, they were evaluating their own work, what Bloom considers to be the highest level of critical thinking. With the use of contract grading, students were able to work toward the final grade of their choice. They could evaluate their own time commitments and level of interest and choose for themselves what assignments they wanted to complete. This model emphasized responsibility for their own learning, as students ultimately chose the grade they received at the end of the unit. By knowing their grade at the beginning, their work became more focused on the process of these activities, not the grade they would receive.

Furthermore, in an effort to emphasize written responses to the novel (which would ultimately scaffold to the final assignment), I required that my students journal on O'Brien's use of different style devices throughout the novel. This prepared the students to more deeply analyze one style device in the culminating project, and it ensured that students were reading and responding to the text without giving reading quizzes – a practice antithetical to my beliefs about grading. Unlike reading quizzes, these journals allowed students to reflect on the novel without worrying about the answer the teacher was looking for. They could respond to the text in a more authentic way, unburdened by the teacher's evaluation of their answers. Thus, I hoped that students would take risks in their journals and respond to the text in unique and personal ways. I also chose to emphasize active participation in discussions and activities. Because my sections of Advanced 11 tended to be quiet during discussion, I wanted to ensure that they had some incentive to talk during class. For some, participating in class discussions is a risk, so I planned

different methods of discussion throughout the unit, ranging from stations to student-led to teacher-led, in an effort to give all students an opportunity to participate in a comfortable environment.

The Final Assignment

Because my students knew they would not be graded, I was anxious to see how their final assignments would turn out. I did include a caveat in the contract that I explained to my students as we discussed their final project: I expect the essays to be of the quality of the grade you contracted for. Thus, if papers were incomplete or lacking substance, I did reserve the right to return those essays and discuss the necessary revisions. Of the 37 students in my Advanced 11 classes, 21 contracted for an A, 13 contracted for a B, and 3 contracted for a C. Additionally, of those 37 students, I only returned four essays for further revisions. These results indicate that my students did put forth quality effort and met the expectations I had for their work. At first, I worried that the grading curve looked skewed (typically there should be more B's and C's than A's); however, I thought back to Guskey's questions, "Is my purpose to *select* talent or *develop* it?" and I felt confident that many A-quality papers was, in fact, my goal.

Furthermore, although several students complained to me about having to read their stories aloud in class, publishing their work did encourage my students to put extra care into their stories ("I was motivated to work hard as I did not want to embarrass myself"). After sharing a story, groups discussed the qualities that stood out to them, which set the tone for a respectful and valuable shared experience. When one group finished early, I overheard the students generate a conversation about the unique assets of their stories. Without prompting, this group shared what

they found interesting in each other's stories and complimented qualities like a vivid setting, interesting use of dialogue, and realistic characterization. As I listened to the group's discussion, I realized that the positive and supportive environment in which students shared their stories afforded students the courage to actually share their stories, which for some was a risk. The students' responses to each other's stories were complimentary and specific, and the sharer received feedback on exemplary sections of his story.

The objectives of the unit were to explore the differences between truth and fiction, the style devices that create a story-truth, and the ways in which we can use those style devices in our own writing. The final assignment proved to me that the students accomplished each task. In discussing *The Things They Carried* and creating their own stories (which we practiced several times throughout the unit), students examined the ways in which truth can be conveyed through fiction. In writing their final essays, students analyzed the style devices that convey story-truth in the novel, and in writing their final stories, students practiced using those elements in their own writing.

Rick argued in his paper that "Tim O'Brien's manipulation of setting in *The Things They Carried* enhances the overall mood of the novel, as well as improving the reader's connections to the feelings of the characters within." He went on to cite examples of how setting influences characterization and mood within the novel:

In the chapter titled 'Church', the soldiers seek refuge in a battered monastery, a very different environment than the front lines. By using this form of contrast, O'Brien paves the way for a deeper understanding of the soldiers' inner conflicts concerning peace. (Rick, Final Assignment, 2/7/14)

In his essay, Rick displays his ability to analyze Tim O'Brien's writing style, a sign of higher order thinking in Bloom's Taxonomy. Rick then wrote his short story on one man's experience with September 11. Rick wrote from the man's perspective as he watched the plane crash into the World Trade Center from inside the building. Thus, Rick demonstrated his understanding of descriptive setting in his own writing. Rick's ability to demonstrate his understanding of setting through a short story of his own creation rests in what Bloom considers Synthesis, another pursuit of higher order thinking.

Chapter 5

Analysis of Student Work and Improvements

“I liked the grading contract we had in this class as it allowed me to take risks but still held me to a standard.” (Robyn, Survey, 2/27/14)

As my ultimate goals with contract grading were to allow for intellectual risks and increase the focus on learning in the classroom, I will analyze its effects on these two aspects of learning in this chapter. I will include speculation on two other grading models, student-determined grades and student-created rubrics, to round out my research and offer further possibilities to shift away from traditional grading.

Risk-taking

Throughout the unit of contract grading, I often encouraged my students to take risks in their writing. I suspected that, without the fear of a grade, my students would be more likely to try something outside of their comfort zones. Especially in the genre of creative writing, I wanted to offer my students the chance to take risks.

At the start of the final project, Ania asked, “So, there’s not really a right answer to this, is there?” I assured her that there was not, and in fact there hadn’t been a ‘right answer’ to anything we’d done in the unit. She seemed relieved and dove into writing her story. Ania wrote a personal story, which I did allow as an option for the final project. It read:

Pinching myself over and over, I made my way back to Mark's house. With what seemed like hours of a car ride, we were in my driveway in 7 minutes. At 11:58 am my father informed me that we had lost my sister's husband, Christopher that morning. "Please remember me for who I could have been," Chris cried out from the middle of the night in a desperate facebook post. There was nothing I could do but cry. I cried, cried, cried, and cried, but the tears will never go away. Every tear that ran down my face had been tattooed onto my heart. (Ania, Final Assignment, 2/7/14)

Ania opened up about a personal experience, which is a risk in its own right.

Furthermore, she did so in a risky way. Rather than explicitly state what had happened to Christopher, she chose to describe the events surrounding the accident and allow her audience to infer what had happened to Chris. Ania chose to experiment with a different way of telling her story, a risk she might not have taken had the outcome been tied to a grade.

Daniel took a risk in his attempt to tell the story of a man enduring withdrawal. He wrote from the man's perspective, his words becoming sparser until his story eventually ends with, "I can't stand it anymore. I need..." and a scribble. Dan took a very creative risk in that he did not conclude with a standard ending. He attempted something very different from what we see in conventional storytelling. However, he took great pride in his story and worked hard to perfect it. Because Dan did not need to worry about the authority of others to determine his grade, he could take a very intriguing risk that he took pride in.

Finally, Nate wrote his story from the perspective of a man jumping from the World Trade Center on September 11. This story is written in a stream of consciousness style, and as I

discussed it with Nate after, he conveyed to me that his choice of format was a risk he was excited to attempt. I got a sense of his willingness to try a new style and take a risk.

However, not all students were so willing to take a risk. In his post-survey, Dylan conveyed that he did not feel comfortable writing creatively, and therefore he did not attempt to write a final story. He was not willing to take a risk for fear of his own bad writing. From Dylan's critical feedback, I learned that I could have spent more time teaching the craft of story-writing in an attempt to assuage fears of poor writing in my students. While I did give my students ample time to prepare, I did not explicitly teach them how to write a story, which might have helped some risk-averse students ease into creative writing.

I believe that student-determined grades would also lend itself to an increased ability to take risks. A student and teacher might conference together to discuss the writing assignment and determine a grade, merging the student's and teacher's opinions. John Presley used this approach in his own college composition class. Rather than assign a grade, Presley wrote comments on students' papers and held conferences in which students assigned and defended grades for their own papers. He discovered that he usually agreed with the students' opinions. Furthermore, he found that "real information was being exchanged. The students did not see themselves in a passive role before an arbitrary judge" (14). Presley's system ultimately supports the pursuit of creativity and intellectual risk-taking. Rather than turning in an assignment to the teacher and nervously awaiting a grade, students have the chance to explain their choices and defend their work. Thus, students can explore creative pursuits, defend them, and decide upon a grade with the teacher.

If I were to use this approach in my own classroom, I might first attempt it with an essay, not a creative assignment, to see how students might take risks in their argumentative work. In

reading their work, I would write comments, but not assign a grade. There would be no rubric. After reading a student's work, I would pull him aside for a conference to discuss his work as a whole. Following Presley's structure, I might start the conference by asking the student to assign himself a grade. A discussion of the student's work as a whole would then generate from his explanation of his chosen grade, allowing us, as Presley noticed in his conferences, to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the paper and what the student might work on to improve in the next assignment. To conclude the conference, the student and I would decide on a grade together.

Additionally, when students are invited to create their own rubrics, either individually or as a class, they gain control over their learning and its measurement. Vicki Spandel says of rubrics, "The journey is a gradually unfolding revelation, during which we continually discover new ways to express what we think and feel" (19). Spandel focuses here on expression, and she asserts that students who create their own rubrics learn to define the qualities of writing that they value. She continues, "When students design and use their own rubrics... they come to see those rubrics less as rigid requirements and more as *writing guides*" (20). Thus, she argues, rubrics do not stunt creativity and intellectual risk-taking in the way that traditional grades do. Rather, they become a way to define, describe, and celebrate that very creativity. Students who create their own rubrics set goals for themselves; they do not have limits placed upon them from someone else.

Focus on Learning

My second goal was to shift the focus from grades to learning. Prior to this unit, I often heard my students discussing "what they got," asking what they "did wrong," or asking, "If this

were graded, what would you give it?" I feared that the emphasis on grades detracted from an emphasis on learning, and I hoped that contract grading would create a more receptive learning environment. Following the unit, Jen wrote, "I have really enjoyed contract grading in English this year. I find myself able to focus more on my ideas, instead of worrying about what I think the teacher might want to hear. It's a very freeing experience." Jen claims that she is able to focus on ideas, not the teacher's judgment, which allows her to take control of her own learning and feel a greater freedom in the learning process. To me, this indicates her willingness to focus on her learning, not her grade.

Furthermore, as students completed their style analysis journals, they were asked to resubmit the journals if they did not meet the standard of the class. This resubmission did not affect the grade; if the journal met expectations, it would receive full credit no matter how many tries it took. This system was tough for students who had not yet mastered style analysis. However, it did allow them to try and improve without worrying that the extra submissions would impede their grade. In this sense, students were able to focus on learning this set of skills, not on the grade their journal would receive.

However, as with risk-taking, a small number of students were actually more stressed. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Jeremy reported, "The unit as a whole was stressful for me and felt like I wasn't reading to enjoy the story but reading for a grade." Jeremy felt as though he was still reaching for a certain grade, despite the fact that individual assignments were not graded. He felt more stressed by the grading contract unit than more traditionally graded units he'd experienced in the past. Jeremy's response indicates to me that the grading contract method does not work for every student, at least not immediately. I suspect he is very accustomed to grades, and to so quickly change the grading structure did not sit well with him. His response reminds me of Alfie

Kohn's suggestion to involve students in the process of deemphasizing grades; perhaps if I had asked this student's opinion earlier in the process, he would have offered some intriguing suggestions for a new grading method.

In a different grading model, student-created rubrics could become a vehicle through which we could learn more about writing and ourselves. If I were to use student-created rubrics in my own class, I might spend a day discussing the qualities of "good" writing as a class and deciding the most important qualities to include in our class rubric. Thus, we would acknowledge what we appreciate about other authors. I might try student-created rubrics with a creative assignment (perhaps a short story or a memoir assignment) first in an effort to promote risk-taking and creativity. As a class, we would determine what we value most (clarity, voice, or grammar, perhaps), and decide how much of the assignment that skill is worth. Then, as students begin to write their papers, they can focus on the skills that they value or want to improve upon most, as reflected in their rubrics. When students turn in their assignments, I would ask them to score themselves on our rubric. As I read and comment on the papers, I could note where my assessment and their own self-evaluation differed, and make the comments necessary to explain the gap. Thus, creating a rubric together would focus learning even more and allow students to have a say in what they practice most in their writing. Furthermore, because the rubric is created by the class as a whole, I suspect that student-created rubrics would decrease the pressure of grading. Although the essay does still receive a grade, the fact that it comes from the students' values means that grade would take a secondary focus to the skills the students are most interested in.

Student-determined grades, on the other hand, support a focus on learning because students make their own choices and explain them. They don't have to submit the assignment for

blind assessment. It does, however, require a level of maturity from students. Especially when operating in a school that values traditional grading, students might feel compelled to assign themselves an A and refuse to compromise. If this becomes the case, the grade does take the focus away from learning, and the system has not accomplished its goals. However, with diligence, I feel confident that most students could handle the maturity of self-assessment.

Overall, I found that the contract grading unit accomplished my ultimate goals: affording students room to take risks and creating an atmosphere more focused on learning than grading. Most students did respond positively to contract grading, and, beyond that, they produced quality final essays. With the experience of the unit and students' feedback, I felt ready to tweak contract grading for my AP 11 students.

Improvements in a New Unit

With my AP 11 students, I decided to focus the final assignment on the short story, not an essay, in an attempt to allow for more risks and creativity in the unit. Thus, their grading contract looked slightly different (See Appendix B).

Instead of focusing on analysis in the final project, the contract asked students to create and then re-create. First, all students wrote a fictional narrative. Then, they had the option to represent the theme, or truth, in a different medium for a higher grade. The students were still expected to share their final assignments in small groups, as I found that this aspect of the contract ensured a level of quality without requiring a grade from the teacher. Students wanted to do well for their peers, so they worked hard even without the pressure of a grade.

In this second unit, I noticed students taking very interesting intellectual risks. Some admitted that they were writing fiction for the first time since eighth grade, and for those students, just getting back in the habit of writing fiction required some risk-taking. To fulfill the A contract, students re-presented the truths of their stories in an alternative form. Students prepared poems, painted art pieces, and composed music to accompany their original stories. One student even created a video game. The project allowed these students to explore how a different medium supports or changes a story, which was an ongoing exploration in the unit. Without the pressure of grades, I believe that students were more willing to experiment with genre, however unsure of the results they were.

For example, when Ivy began crafting her story, she exclaimed, “I’m no good at writing fiction!” However, through the process of sculpting her narrative, Ivy was able to experiment with different writing techniques and truly learn more about writing stories. Ivy entered the classroom on our Storytelling Day and said, “My story has changed so much from what it originally was. I scrapped it two days ago and rewrote the whole thing.” If Ivy had been conscious of a grade at the end of her writing, she might not have been willing to completely revise her story. Ultimately, though, Ivy took a risk by exploring a genre with which she was uncomfortable and allowing herself to veer from her original plan. Ivy’s story was about immigrant victims of domestic abuse:

Do you remember the first time you sat up crying from a nightmare? Do you remember the first time your mother or father refused to rock you back to sleep and you sat up at night absolutely alone?... I distinctly remember the first night my parents decided I had to learn to deal with my own nightmares... I sat on my bed, hot tears felt like grill marks down my face. (Ivy, Final Assignment, 4/3/14)

In her reflection, Ivy wrote, “Although I have no experience in the situation of the characters, when I think of utter fear and no alternative, I recall the nightmares of my childhood and when my parents stopped coddling me when I had one. The comparison accentuates the feeling of being abandoned with no alternative route.” In her reflection, Ivy displays the thought she put into this personal metaphor. She transformed a situation with which she has no experience into one to which she and her audience can relate: feeling alone and afraid after a nightmare. Ivy took a risk by exploring an uncomfortable genre, but her effort ultimately paid off in this very powerful metaphor about fear and loneliness.

For her second representation that conveyed the same truth in a different medium (Figure 1), Ivy chose to construct a gilded cutout of the United States, representing the American Dream that immigrants seek. However, peeking out from under the map with the gold paper torn away



Figure 1: Ivy’s Representation, Final Assignment, 4/7/14

read lines such as, “Calling her a prostitute or a ‘mail order bride’” and, “Taking the money she was to send to support her children in her home country.” These phrases signify ways in which

men can repress their immigrant spouses, and the fact that they are hidden under the torn gold paper represents how the pursuit of the American Dream hides dark consequences for these women. Ivy reflected that she preferred her short story to her visual representation; she worried that the visual did not convey her truth as clearly. However, Ivy took a risk in representing her story in such a creative and interpretive way. Had she worried about her grade, Ivy might have chosen a safer representation, rather than one she was proud of.

Aliza wrote her story about cruel farm conditions. She wrote the story in three parts: The Cow, The Pig, and The Chicken, and she focused on cruelty toward these three different animals. After she read the story, Aliza admitted that the process inspired her to become a vegan:

As well as constructing a story out of this article, I have also recently become a Humane-itarian. This is a term I made up to describe my diet: basically vegan, but if I know where the animal products come from (i.e. my chicken's eggs, a friend's home-made cheese) I will consider eating it. No meat, though. (Aliza, Final Assignment, 4/3/14)

In completing her final assignment, Aliza came to better understand herself and her own values. As she wrote from the perspectives of different animals, she solidified her belief in the cruelty of farm conditions. Aliza's realization displays deeper learning, not of a skill but of herself. The final assignment helped Aliza learn about herself, and she might not have had the chance without writing a short story that pushed her to confront her own beliefs.

In her alternate representation (Figure 2), Aliza created a poster with two human eyes above two plates full of eyes staring back. The text at the bottom of the poster reads, "Watch what you eat." Aliza explained that the eyes on the plates represented the eyes of the animals that people eat, almost as if the animals are judging the human for eating them. Her representation is

sparse, only containing the essential elements needed to convey her truth. Had Aliza worried about a teacher’s interpretation, she may have felt the need to construct a more literal representation. However, because her audience was her group members, not her teacher, she was able to explain the purpose of her poster and justify her decisions to an unbiased audience. Her poster became more about her ideas than the product she thought the teacher would want to see.

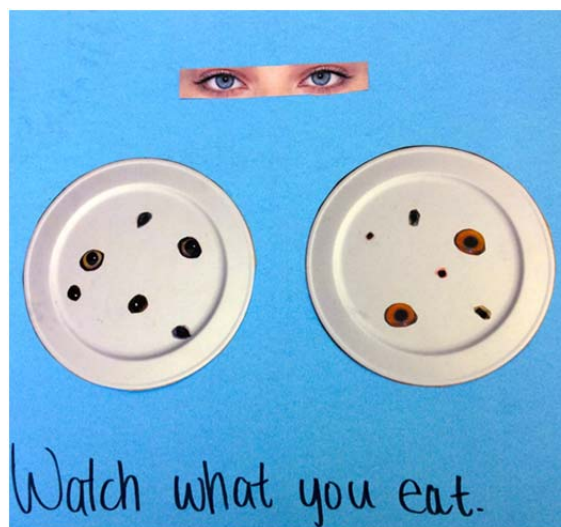


Figure 2: Aliza’s Representation, Final Assignment, 4/7/14

Kylie also wrote a story about domestic abuse, and she chose to represent the issue as an extended metaphor – a woman walking through an increasingly thorny woods. She begins, “The grass was soft and green under her bare feet, as though she were walking on velvet. Each blade lovingly caressed her foot, urging her forward.” At the end of the story, the girl is in danger, trapped by the woods:

Her dress kept getting caught, the branches twisting their fingers into her hair, pulling, tugging, refusing to let go. The thorny stems clawed at her skin, puncturing her arms, her legs, her face. She thrashed desperately, trying to find

any way out of the mess of branch that had ensnared her... She let the branches twist around her, wrapping her in their clutches, and gave in. (Kylie, Final Assignment, 4/3/14)

Kylie's excerpt represents the progression from a safe and new relationship to one that is abusive and seemingly inescapable. If she'd been worried about the teacher understanding the meaning, she might not have chosen such a subtle metaphor. Instead, Kylie might have more literally represented abuse in an attempt to produce a safe product. However, in taking a risk, Kylie produced a beautiful product that captured the emotions she intended to portray.

Kylie's second representation was a picture of a wilted rose (Figure 3). In keeping with the nature metaphor, Kylie chose to capture a wilted flower to represent how a girl wilts, or loses her vibrancy, when she is abused. Kylie explained that she took the photograph herself, but the rose would not wilt on its own, so she used a hair dryer to wilt the flower and then photographed it. Kylie reflected that the process of wilting the rose became part of the art because she, in this



Figure 3: Kylie's Representation, Final Assignment, 4/7/14

case, was the metaphorical abuser. As the photograph came with no written explanation, it was

essential to hear Kylie's interpretation to fully understand the meaning and process of the picture. Kylie was not worried about a grade, so she allowed herself to convey her truth in a way that was true to her; thus, she kept her second representation very simple and interpretive.

With all of these projects, I cannot attribute their brilliance and creativity solely to contract grading. Many variables played a part in the unit that allowed my students to take creative license in the final assignment. However, I do believe that my students felt freedom to explore storytelling and different media without the pressure of receiving a high grade. Their representations were true to themselves and their own aesthetic, not what they thought a teacher wanted to see.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Further Wonderings

“I feel that grades have become more important than learning, but... the actual learning should be more important than grades.” (Savannah, Survey, 2/27/14)

This research with my students is ongoing, and I cannot yet draw any hard conclusions except to say that my work with contract grading has been positive, as have the responses I received from both sets of students.

Because so many students did meet and exceed expectations in their final assignments, I do believe that contract grading provides an equally motivating alternative to traditional grading, especially when students are asked to publish their work in some way. Furthermore, I believe that contract grading allows students to take intellectual risks, rather than attempting to match their teacher’s opinion in their assignments. Risk-taking allows students the freedom to construct their own meaning of the text, and that affordance frees the students and teacher to make meaning together. Finally, by giving students the opportunity to decide their own score, grading contracts ease the attention away from rankings and evaluations. Grades are still a part of the model, but it is my hope that by shifting the focus from grades, students can instead zero in on learning during classroom activities.

In the future, I hope to more deeply explore other alternatives to traditional grading with my students, including student-created rubrics and student-determined grades.

Further Wonderings

I am convinced by my own experiences and my research that traditional grading is not an effective measure of students' work or worth. However, as I continue my research, I do keep some questions in the back of my mind:

- *How might contract grading work with students of lower ability?* Because I only experimented with contract grading in Advanced and AP classes, I do not know how contract grading might function with students of different abilities. Whereas AP students seem highly motivated by grades, students in lower level classes don't seem to care quite as much, so I wonder how motivation might differ in a contract grading system.
- *Does contract grading value completion over quality?* I worry that my students did not always write with as much care as they might have if they knew an assignment was conventionally graded. I wonder how the absence of a grade impacts the quality of work.
- *Can alternative grading approaches work while traditional grades are the norm?* When students are still graded traditionally in other classes, they might view their ungraded work in English as less important. Although the shift away from grades has occurred within the classroom, grades are still a big part of my students' lives, and I wonder how that might interrupt the deeper focus on learning rather than grades.

Although I can't prescribe a solution to all grading uncertainties, I can say that traditional grading systems – especially those in which every assignment counts toward an ultimate grade – do not align with my core beliefs about teaching. When grades play a part in the daily construct of the classroom, grades then become the focus of that classroom. Teachers become judges, risk-taking becomes detrimental to grades, and students feel on edge. Instead, by shifting the focus away

from grades and toward actual learning, students feel free to take intellectual risks and think independently. Contract grading seems to be one method of accomplishing that goal. I hope to seek out other options and prevent my students from wearing the mark of a worrier in my classroom.

Appendix A

Advanced English 11 Unit Contract

The Things They Carried tells the fictional stories of fictional men, but it reveals great truths about O'Brien's real memories. You will now analyze O'Brien's use of one literary element and use that literary element as you transform a modern happening-truth into your own story-truth.

You will get a C if you...

1. Actively participate in all small- and large- group discussions.
2. Turn in all homework.
3. Write a 5-paragraph essay that tracks O'Brien's use of one literary element throughout the book (*dialogue, setting, characterization, etc.*) and analyzes its effect on the book as a whole.
 - 5-paragraph essay
 - CDW Format
 - Include at least three instances of the literary element at work in the text.
 - MLA format

Note: You will be asked to revise the analysis until it meets the quality of the grade you contracted for. (i.e. If you contract for a B, I expect a B paper.)

You will get a B if you...

- 1-3. Do everything listed under C.
4. Write a story that relies heavily on that element and proves you can use it effectively. Choose an impactful event that occurred in your lifetime (*ex: 9/11, Boston Marathon shooting, Iraq War, your choice*). Find a picture from that event, and invent the story that is happening in the picture. Like O'Brien, invent characters, dialogue, settings, and events that turn the happening-truth (reality) of the picture into the story-truth (emotional core) of your short story. Stories should be about 500 words.
 - MLA format
 - Free of grammar, spelling, and mechanical errors

You will get an A if you...

- 1-4. Do everything listed under C and B.

5. When you finish, revisit your story and highlight the instances in which you use your chosen element. Write short comments in the margin (like a teacher would) that explain the purpose of the element, and the effect it has on your own story.
6. Have someone edit your story outside of class. (Turn in your rough draft with edits **and** your new draft.)
7. Read the story aloud in class, prefacing it with an explanation of your element of focus.

Appendix B

Advanced Placement Language and Composition Unit Contract

Maximum of C

- Actively participate in class discussions. Learning is a collaborative process. Without your positive contribution, the learning environment is not as engaging as it could be for you or for others.
- Read all texts assigned, complete the assignment as given, and demonstrate that you've made an effort. (By the way, your reader can tell when you wrote something without doing the reading).
- Complete all in-class activities and writing assignments.
- Write in-class essay following the Toulmin structure.
- Meet due dates and writing criteria for all assignments.
- Write a short story or series of vignettes and complete reflection (adheres to all requirements).

Maximum of B

- Meet all requirements for the "C" grade above.
- Participate in a peer-edit with peer during the writing process and revise assignment. To revise, you don't just correct or touch up. Your revision needs to reshape or extend or complicate or substantially clarify your ideas.
- Read short story or vignettes to small group and provide feedback to peers.

Maximum of A

- Meet all requirements for the "C" and "B" grades above.
- Re-present "story-truth" in a different medium, share with small group, and explain choices.

10% will be deducted from the "A" contracted grade for each missing journal assignment.

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ACADEMIC VITA

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Teaching Experience:

High School English Intern
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- Executed all responsibilities of a full-time English teacher
- Planned units using the Backward Design model
- Developed and execute daily lesson plans
- Differentiated materials and instruction for students of all levels
- Pursued an in-depth inquiry throughout the school year to inform teaching and benefit students

Tutor

The Friendship Tutoring Program

- Designed one-on-one lessons for reading, writing, and math skills
- Implemented lesson with students of diverse ages and abilities

Mentor

LifeLink PSU

- Mentored high school students with cognitive disabilities
- Attended college classes and completed homework with the students
- Challenged students to read and summarize news articles

Recognitions and Awards:

- Dean's List all semesters
- Recipient of the Roger Williams Scholarship

Affiliations:

The Penn State Thespians, **Secretary**
Penn State Children's Show, **Chair**
The Pennsylvania State Education Association, **Member**